DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 313 492 UD 027 179

AUTHOR Kratzert, William F.; Kratzert, Mona Y.
TITLE Characteristics of Continuation High School Students.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Continuation Students; *Dropout Programs; High Schools; Nontraditional Education; Psychological Studies; *Self Concept; Self Concept Measures; *Stress Variables; *Student Characteristics
IDENTIFIERS *Piers Harris Childrens Self Concept Scale

ABSTRACT

This document reports on a study of the self-concept of students enrolled in a continuation high school. A random sample of 40 students was selected from a school of 190 students. All were administered the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale to determine their feelings about themselves, and an author-prepared questionnaire to determine their feelings on a wide range of areas. The following findings are discussed: (1) analysis of responses to the Piers-Harris Scale indicates that the self-concepts of the students fall within average parameters; (2) analysis of responses to the authors' questionnaire indicates that the majority are content with their placement at the continuation high school; (3) the lack of anxiety reported by 65 percent of the students may contribute to enhanced self-esteem and decreased drug abuse; and (4) the negative effect of parents who were either separated or divorced may be offset by the lower stress at the continuation school. The desire of the majority of the students to graduate from high school despite the lack of credits and age on enrollment indicates a need for an earlier intervention program for potential dropouts that will offer greater opportunity to succeed. A list of ten references is appended. (FMW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED313492

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

William Kratzert

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Characteristics of Continuation High School Students

William F. Kratzert

Downey Unified School District

Mona Y. Kratzert

California State University, Fullerton

Running head: CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTINUATION STUDENTS

UD 027 179

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the psychodynamics of students enrolled in a continuation high school to enhance the understanding of continuation students for the professionals who intervene with them. Although many assumptions exist about this student population, little or no research has been done specifically on this group. Forty continuation students were randomly selected and administered the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale and an author-prepared questionnaire which probed students' experiences in a wide range of areas. The findings reveal that contrary to what one would expect regarding the self-concept of these students, they did not appear to have inadequate self-concept. Their responses to the questionnaire appear to suggest that they are satisfied with their alternative school placement. Their concomitant lack of anxiety and satisfaction and happiness would contribute to the outcome of the findings.

Characteristics of

Continuation High School Students

The continuation high school is concerned with assisting students find some measure of educational success which has eluded them in their previous school placement. Although it has been reported that alternative school programs do enhance self-esteem, and reduce students' provocation to dropout of school (e.g. Catteral and Stern, 1986; Mann and Gold, 1981), the authors were unable to find any current research which dealt exclusively with continuation high school students.

Since many parents of students referred to the continuation high school, and school personnel and students at the comprehension high school, view continuation education in negative terms, an accurate, objective appraisal of this student population is of utmost important to dispel, it is hoped, some of the behavioral stereotyping that currently exists. Often, a continuation school education is the only chance for many students to continue their education and to graduate. Yet, their chances for success can be undermined by external factors.

Most studies conducted on curbing the dropout problem and preventing delinquency (e.g. Glaser and Kley, 1982; Self, 1985), do not address the stereotyping that exists towards students attending

the continuation school or towards the continuation school itself. It is the authors' opinion that attitudes do play an important role determining students' success or failure in any program. With this in mind, the present study was undertaken to obtain factual information about this population.

Method

Sample and Procedure

Forty students at the continuation high school were selected as subjects on the basis of a selectively random sample. The student population at the time of this study was 190. Of that number, 26% were minorities; 90% were between the ages of 16 to 18 with a mean age of 17.3; and 56% were males. The forty students selected were representative of the school population.

All students were administered the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (Piers and Harris, 1969) to determine their feelings about themselves, and an author-prepared questionnaire which explored their feelings in a wide range of areas.

Considerable effort was made prior to the survey to establish rapport between the students and the examiner to facilitate an atmosphere of trust. The students were informed of the confidentiality of their responses.

Instruments

The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale has 80 items that was conceived as a unitary measure of self-concept. Six item clusters were obtained through a meta-analysis of interitem correlations. The six item clusters are: (a) behavior, (b) intellectual and school status, (c) physical appearance and attributes, (d) anxiety, (e) popularity, and (f) happiness and satisfaction. The reasons for choosing this instrument were its frequency of use in determining self-concept and its multidimensional design.

The author-prepared questionnaire was developed to assess students' experiences in a wide range of topics that could not be afforded on any standardized test instrument. Because of the empirical nature of the study, it lends itself to a questionnaire of this sort. The questionnaire sampled students' responses in the following areas: (a) like or dislike of continuation school placement, (b) number of school districts previously attended, (c) family cohesiveness, (d) educational plans and aspirations, (e) communication with peers and staff at the comprehensive and continuation school setting, (g) special education placement, and (h) communication with parents.

Results

The findings of students' responses to the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale yielded a mean score which fell within average parameters, 55th percentile, 5th stanine. This finding would reflect that as a group, the continuation students do not experience low self-concept. By further analysis of the six clusters which constitute the scale, the following information is derived: (a) behavior - only 32% responded conversely to the desired response, (b) intellectual and school status - only 22% responded conversely to the desired response, (c) physical appearance and attributes - only 48% responded conversely to the desired response, (d) anxiety - only 35% responded conversely to the desired response, (e) popularity - only 25% responded conversely to the desired response, and (h) happiness and satisfaction - only 25% responded conversely to the desired response.

Finally, when the scale was subjected to an item analysis, the following six items proved to elicit responses more converse than others: (a) I am different from others - 74% responded yes, (b) I am a leader in sports and games - 68% responded no, (c) I am an important member of my class - 84% responded no, (d) I often volunteer in school - 64% responded no, (e) I usually want my own way - 72% responded yes, and (f) I lose my temper easily - 64%

responded yes.

The results of the author-prepared questionnaire revealed to following information: (a) like or dislike of the continuation school placement - 92% said they liked the continuation school placement, (b) number of school districts previously attended - 80% had attended two or more school districts, (c) family cohesiveness - 60% come from homes in which either the parents are divorced or separated, (d) educational plans and aspirations - 84% plan to graduate from high school and 68% plan to continue their education after graduation, (e) chemical dependency - 48% of the students said they are currently using drugs, and 80% said they had but are not presently, (f) communication with peers and staff at the comprehensive and continuation high schools - 80% of the students said they found it easy to communicate with staff and peers at the continuation high school, but only 27% said they found it easy to communicate with staff and peers and the comprehensive high school, (g) special education placement - 12% of the students had previously been enrolled in special education classes, and (h) communication with parents - 52% responded that they communicate well with their parents.

Discussion

An analysis of the data reveals that an overwhelming majority of

students are content with their placement at the continuation high school. This can be attributed to many factors, but, most important seems to be the lack of pressure in the area of academic achievement. This is the result of allowing students to do class assignments at their own pace, as well as, at a level which proves for many to be commensurate with their achievement. As a result, students experience less frustration.

The instruction in most classes is based on a contractual design which enables students to earn one credit each time they complete a contract. This normally requires two weeks. Because of the design of the curriculum and the smaller class size, the teacher does not give a directed lesson, but, rather, assists students with any difficulties they may encounter. It is thought that because of the individual attention afforded students, communication is fostered between teachers and students. Although it is often cited that one of the major reasons for students dropping out of school is because of poor student-teacher relations (Brower, 1964; Wehlage and Rutter, 1985), it is believed that the curriculum design is mainly responsible for improvement in this area. Indeed, Wehlage and Rutter (1985) stated that schools need to redefine school work to allow more students to achieve success and satisfaction in order to discourage students from dropping out of school.

The results of the survey also reveal that the self-concept of students falls within average parameters. At first glance, this may seem unusual since most students attending continuation school have experienced school dissatisfaction and failure for several years. At this time, however, students are finding some measure of success. Kagan (1988) reported that success enhanced the self-esteem of a student when the student accepted responsibility for the success.

Adequate self-concept may further explain the decline in chemical dependency among students. Miller (1988) has found, for example, that development of a positive self-esteem decreased the potential for alcohol and drug abuse. Moreover, D. J. Samuels and M. Samuels (1974) reported that 75.5% of the adolescents they studied considered low self-concept to be one cause of their turning to drugs.

The lack of anxiety as evidenced by 65% of the students not having difficulty in this area, is viewed as one of the major contributors to enhanced self-concept and a decrease in chemical dependency. This is substantiated by Wolf's study (1981) which indicated that adolescent drug abusers viewed life as a struggle, felt powerless and used drugs to cope with anxiety.

Kagan (1988) has reported that the lack of family unity,

cohesiveness and stability as reported in psychological, educational and sociological research has an impact on academic achievement. She also stated that underachievement has consistently been associated with a single-parent or broken family environment. In the survey, 60% of the students come from homes in which parents are either divorced or separated. Since many of the stressors continuation school students experienced in the former school setting have been reduced, it is believed that the coming from a broken home doesn't have as great an influence as it might have had previously. This is supported by the majority of students responding that they communicate well with their parent(s), and the outcome on the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale.

Although the majority of the students at the continuation high school wish to graduate, few will graduate from a public high school. This results from the students' severe lack of credits and age, 16 or 17, upon enrollment. Therefore, a need exists to have an earlier intervention program for youngsters who are having difficulty adjusting in the mainstream of public education and who appear to be potential dropouts.

This study was undertaken at one continuation high school and its student population. Since continuation schools do vary in their curriculum, it would, therefore, be misleading to generalize these

findings to all continuation schools. The findings do suggest that scholastic success and ability to communicate well with teachers do have a dramatic effect on developing more appropriate behaviors and reducing the drop out potential for many students.

It is hoped that this study will increase the understanding and sharpen perceptions about students who attend continuation school so they can be viewed accurately and objectively.

References

Brower, G. (1963). Socio-economic characteristics of dropouts. In B. I. Greene (Ed.), Eastern Michigan University's Workshop on the Dropout (pp. 25-32). Ypsilanti, MI. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 001 080)

Catteral, J. S. and Stern D. (1986). The effects of alternative school programs on high school completion and labor market outcomes. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 8(1), 77-86.

Glaser, R. E. and Kley, R. C. (1982, March). Keeping high risk students in school. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, San Francisco, CA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 216 462)

Kagan, D. M. (1988). A discriminant analysis of alternative versus regular high school students. The High School Journal, 71(2), 60-68.

Mann, D. W. and Gold, M. (1981). The contribution of alternative school programs to the safety of american schools. Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 218 551)

Miller, R. (1988). Positive self-esteem and alcohol drug related attitudes among school children. Journal of Alcohol and Drug

Education, 33(3), 26-31.

Piers, E. V. and Harris, D. B. (1969). The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. Nashville, TN: Counselor Recordings and Tests.

Samuels, D. J. and Samuels M. (1974). Low self-concept as a cause of drug abuse. Journal of Drug Education, 4(4), 421-436.Self, T. C. (1985). Dropouts: a review of literature, project talent search. Monroe, LA: Northeast Louisiana University. (ERIC Document Reproducation Service No. ED 260 307)

Wehlage, G. G. and Rutter, R. A. (1985). Dropping out: how much do schools contribute to the problem? Madison, WI: Wisconsin Center for Education Research. (ERIC Document Reproducation No. ED 275 799)

Wolf, B. M. (1981). The struggling adolescent: a social-phenomenological study of adolescent substance abuse. Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education, 26(3), 51-61.